



# Medical Informatics

Once again the December issue of *The Western Journal of Medicine* is a special issue on a topic that the editors believe is, or soon will be, of importance for physicians. In recent years the subjects have been “high-tech” medicine (1985), personal health maintenance (1984), cross-cultural medicine (1983), occupational/environmental medicine (1982), geriatrics (1981) and cost of care (1980). Each year the special issue has been developed under the purview of a special editor with both a particular interest and a recognized competence in the field.

This year the editors have selected “Medical Informatics” as the topic for the special issue. The term “medical informatics” is coming into general usage among those who are interested in the capabilities, and potential capabilities, of new electronic methods of collecting, processing, storing, analyzing and using information to advance medical science and improve patient care. Physicians who already have their own computers, and use them as sources of medical information as well as for practice management, are at the cutting edge of what will surely be a new era in medical care. Many of them are no doubt quite familiar with the term “medical informatics.” For those who have not yet joined this inner circle, it is hoped this issue will provide a window through which they can view some of what is going on in this important and relatively new field.

The journal is most fortunate to have Marsden S. Blois, PhD, MD, as Special Editor for this issue. Dr Blois is Professor of Medical Information Science and Dermatology at the University of California School of Medicine in San Francisco. He is current president of the American College of Medical Informatics. We are grateful to Dr Blois for using his knowledge, expertise and professional connections to assemble the fascinating and provocative papers that appear in this issue.

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